

CLIFFORD THE DUKE

SAXES

SPROUT
#1

NOVEMBER 2024



INTRODUCING MONTREAL’S HOTTEST RISING ROCKSTAR: CLIFFORD THE DUKE

CLIFFORD THE DUKE arrives at exactly the same time as we do, looking sharp as usual, black and white studded leather biker jacket, combat boots, and black jeans. He’s going to a show afterwards, so we head straight to the coffee shop to get started.

Clifford has been part of Montreal’s music scene for the past two and a half years, but he has been entertaining his whole life: “I am originally an actor,” he says. “I was in kid shows. When I was a kid, I used to watch Kaboum, and I told my parents: “I want to be doing that!” I was six.” Growing up, he had a role as Bao in the popular kid’s show *Les Argonautes*. Then he became interested in music: “I guess the first instrument for me came when I was around 10. My mother played some guitar and knew enough to show me some chords. Then piano came around, and I became focused on piano for a while.”

NBT: When did you first have the thought, “Oh, I want to make my own music”?

Clifford: It was when I was 14. I went to see a local band that inspired me. Hubert Lenoir was in that group!



At that point I played bass and dabbled with all kinds of stuff, you know, piano and guitar.

NBT: And when was “Clifford the Duke” born?

Clifford: I adopted that name when I was 15. I had to pick a name for my YouTube channel. I was on GarageBand whenever I had a break and was composing and programming; always rock and pop centric. I used acoustic drums and other real instruments on digital.

NBT: So when did it go from playing around to really creating new music?

Around age 15-16 I was in my first band. Although it wasn’t really working, I thought: it’s OK, I’ll keep making my own music after this! But around that time some shit happened at school, and in my romantic life—and I became EMO ! I started jamming to old Panic, My Chem, Fall Out Boy, Twenty-One Pilots... It was that 2016 internet-emo era. Yeah, that’s when my taste really started to influence my music.

NBT: When did you start performing and taking music seriously?

Clifford: That all started when I released my first album (*I’ve Loved, Hated, Known You Since High School*, released in 2022). Connecting back with alt-pop-emo, that’s where I became more focused on composing full-fledged songs, writing lyrics, and eventually performing in shows.

CLIFFORD THE DUKE’s new single (*Lee Spelled “Leigh”/Gentle*) was released on Spotify last month. The sound is moody and catchy, the lyrics passionate and vulnerable, and the songs are overall masterfully produced. Clifford is really excited about his new project. “I think that I leveled the fuck up!” he exclaims, leaning forward.

NBT: The new single you just released. Explain everything!

Clifford: Like I told you, I’m positive that this is my best work EVER! I dropped a single in January called *Letters*

which sounded, maturity wise, like my first album—it was in that same universe. But for this new project, I told myself: “I want to enter a different era of me!” So, I upgraded my gear, I started working with a different mixing engineer, Guillaume Tanguay. I became more intentional in the way that I record. It’s better mixed, more methodical. *Gentle* is a song is about sexual tension turning into feelings. After my last break up, I had a “hoe” phase. *Gentle* is about coming out of that phase and realizing I’m ready for more than just casual. And I fell for someone, it happened through sexual tension, and we didn’t end up dating even though I was ready to love again—and it fucked me up! There will be a sister song to *Gentle*—It will come out soon.

NBT: And *Lee spelled “Leigh”*?

Clifford: I’d say it’s a character-based song. And the character is a personification of addiction, specifically sex addition, which is something not a lot of people talk about. The song addresses the ways in which your relationship with your



own sexuality can become toxic, and how you can hurt yourself by acting like you don’t care about these “hook-ups” even though it’s affecting you. I think *Lee spelled “Leigh”* is also about the questions you should ask yourself before you pursue something you desire. You could say the song

is about temptation and how the inability to say no can lead to hurting yourself!

NBT: Who is Leigh/Lee?

Clifford: There is no person named Lee nor Leigh. It’s kind an alter-ego for me, voiced by Montreal-based R&B singer Gaëlle. That’s also why I was so intentional [when I commissioned Seja for the cover art] about having the non-sexualized cat woman cover for the single. It’s a personal battle and not a dispute with another person or living in a toxic situation.

NBT: What can we expect from you in the coming year?

Clifford: Oh! Well, this double single, they sound like they’re from the same universe. But moving forward, my mission statement is Tonal Whiplash! I like to experiment with a lot of genres. Although I just created these poppy alternative songs; I want to write a Folk EP next! Then, I’ll do a punk EP. Then, an indie rock EP! I’m much better at playing with genres now. Expect the unexpected.

Shape: Ye has’t anon answ’r’d all from our tongue!

Seja: Pronounce a gage we’ll carryeth out ‘long!

Clifford: OMG! I mean I can’t really speak old english.

Okay you want a statement! Wait! I have lyrics. An excerpt!

“I’m opiniated, pretty calculated, traumatized, and some say easily manipulated!”

NBT: That’s intriguing!

Clifford: Lyrics from one of my songs!



XENIA JEFFERY-OFF

SPROUT #1



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ON *HOLLOW*, BY XENIA JEFFERY-OFF

NBT: Why did you start doing photography? Where did your initial interest come from?

Xenia: The first pictures I ever took with photographic intent were taken with my auntie’s camera. It was mostly street photography. I grew up around downtown Ottawa. I’ve also spent some time around Vancouver and Toronto. I captured my surroundings.

NBT: What about photographing people?

Xenia: Growing up, I was a really shy kid. The first photographs I took were of things familiar to me, so no people. I only started shooting people when I turned 16. They were pretty bad pictures actually...

I’m much harder on myself now. Photography is something I’m pretty self-critical about. It’s an instinct of mine to look at my old work and think that it’s bad. There have been some instances though where I look at something I did at, like, 14 and I’ve thought “Wow! There is something there!”

NBT: What made you decide “I need to go to school for photography”?

Xenia: I knew that I liked photography, but I could never imagine doing it as much as I do now. I also did not think I was good enough. I was thinking-theoretically, I could go to school for photography, but I had no portfolio, no foundation.



I’d say it was something I had to realize I could do. Initially, I studied history in university. Then, I took a long break and actually worked in a museum. It was the Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, and there I read and bought so many photo-books. I now have a really large collection! When it finally came time to start applying for schools again, I thought “its time for me to do something hands-on.”

NBT: It’s interesting how you were a history major because photography and history are quite compatible!

Xenia: Yes... the possibilities of working in the archive, handling documents, developing film, being part of the history of the document.

One thing about photography as a profession is that it is almost always about art as form of documentation. Yes, it can be very figurative and yes it can have a lot of subversive and implicit meaning, but at the end of the day, a painting can’t document reality the same way a photograph does. The photograph captures almost exactly what happened in that instant.

NBT: Would you say photography is like a time capsule?

Xenia: Not quite! Time capsules are so intentional. I can’t take all the credit for a picture being a part of history. Sometimes the most important images are caught on CCTV cameras or throwaway shots from journalists. Photography is just not intentional enough of a process.

“I don’t believe that you can control history. We have to accept it as it is. I’m here, other people are around me, and that’s all I need to focus on as a photographer. It’s about showing how I see the future and showing how I see the present... if that ends up capturing history, then I’m happy!”



NBT: So maybe pictures that you don’t think are significant today will end up being significant in the future.

Xenia: That’s why I like to have a catalogue! All these images represent something about my life. But it is definitely a bottomless pit— theorizing about how my images will affect people in the future, going forward.

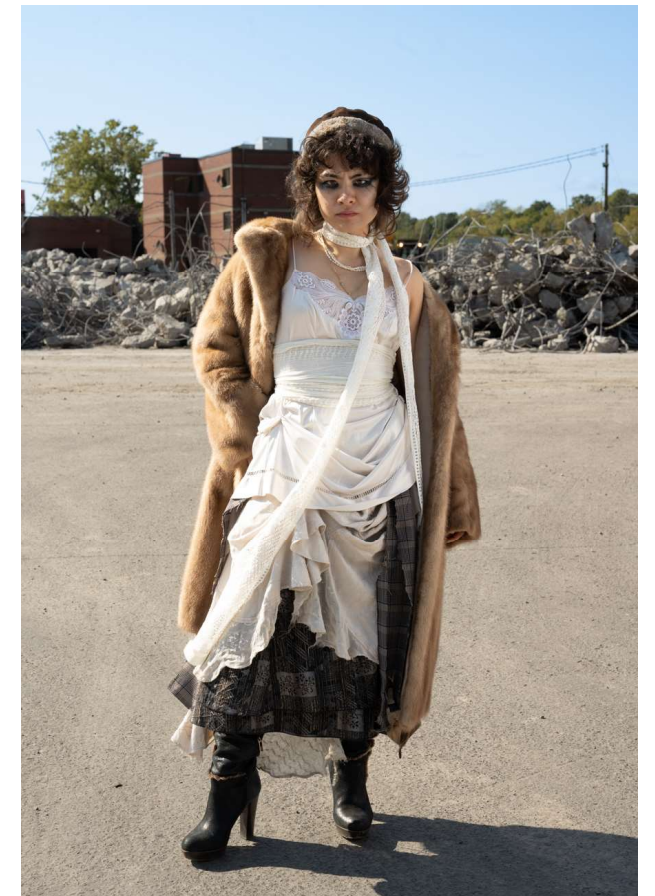
NBT: Let’s talk about our shoot we did together, *Hollow*. What was that all about?

Xenia: So, my original idea with that shoot was to show a very specific kind of decay. I wanted it to look like civilization is falling apart and this is what is left... But you guys blew it out of the water with your styling, honestly! You came dressed as nuclear family breadwinners, which added even more meaning to the images. You have someone dressed as the traditional Mother and Father, and you have piles and mounds of household waste in the background. To me, it seems like you embodied people who were once rejected from the system, but in this apocalyptic setting, have now taken on the costume of those who were considered the previous ideal standard.

What happens when the population starts to decline? What does it look like when we don’t have traditional families anymore?

I believe the future will be about people playing house but not having any kids. It’s interesting to juxtapose that idea with evidence of household waste and over-consumption. That’s why I love this shoot. You can’t really be conservative if you’re over-consuming.

NBT: Once the apocalypse happens and nature destroys all of human civilization and there’s only trash left. Who or what do you think will be thriving in that environment?



“I think it will be what it has always been; the most vicious. Humanity has always been followed by violence. Is it good? No. But if we’re talking about an apocalypse where everything falls to pieces, it is definitely the most vicious that will live and thrive.”

—Xenia Jeffery-Off





CRAWFORD

R.E.

BENNET DIAZ

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Figure 1 : The Personification of Grief



Enter Seja, interviewer, and Crawford R.E. Bennett-Diaz, multidisciplinary artist interested in the abject, supernatural, spiritual, and erotic. His creations give physical forms to emotions, memories, the subconscious and the otherworldly.

Shape sits nearby with a notebook on their thigh, recording by hand the conversation.

Seja

Congratulations on the exposition! Amazing work as always. Before we talk about the pieces you are displaying today, let's start with an explanation of the themes of your artwork. Specifically, the erotic and violent imagery you tend to gravitate towards. What's that about?

Crawford

It's hard to trace back how and where it started, but since I grew to an age where I could begin understanding myself on a more profound and abstract level, and I guess somewhere along the line, due to the life I've lived thus far, I have been drawn to sexuality and the grotesque; horror – and I believe, since then, violence and sexuality have always gone hand in hand. It's a dichotomy I often represent in my creations.

Seja

Would you describe your art as cathartic?

Crawford

Yes, absolutely. Everything I create is done with the aim of expelling or dispelling an emotion or an experience. I give faces to sensations, feelings and figments.

Seja

And what about the supernatural elements of your artworks, where do those come from?

Crawford

All the supernatural references come from first-hand experiences. For instance, this creature (figure 1). I'm not sure where it came from or what it is, but it's based off something I've seen before in my life. It's its own entity. Like a ghost or a spirit.

Seja

Tell me more about this creature. What does it represent?

Crawford

Well, this piece is titled *Personification of Grief*, and it is quite literally just that. I drew it after the last of my four cats passed away. It was such a painful experience, they were friends I had for close to 18 years, and this creature spawned from those intense sensations and emotions. Beyond the loss of my cats, it got me thinking of losses of people in my life as well, loss of people that are still alive; and it all lumped together to become that. That's what Grief looks like to me. That's what I was feeling.

Seja

Interesting. Now tell me about *Lilo* (figure 2).

Crawford

The oil painting. I haven't developed this character, Lilo, completely. But he's important to me and he does have lore. He is the personification of sexual liberty in the most positive way; he embodies sensuality and promiscuity. In this fantasy world I made, he's a kind of siren who has both a vagina and a penis in his human form — and both organs are fully functioning.

If you look closely, you'll notice that the hand pressed onto his chest is wearing a matching ring. That's his husband, who is a sort of aristocrat. They have a very possessive yet loving relationship. Although it's almost like a master and slave dynamic, it's a healthy and mutual one, as Lilo desires for it to be this way.

Seja

And what materials did you use to create these pieces?

Crawford

For *Personification of Grief* (figure 1), I used a mix of charcoal, conte, pastel and pencil crayon on raw canvas. *Lilo* was created with just oil paints. *Grief* is 4 by 6 feet, and *Lilo* is 30 by 48 inches.

Seja, pensive

And these supernatural beings that you've represented in your artwork — why do you think you've been able to communicate with them? What does their presence mean to you?

Crawford

In terms of the ones depicted here, they came to me suddenly years ago, first from a trance-like state in the form of a drawing, then eventually in person. I can't say I know why, other than that they chose to approach me for whatever reason. I feel very connected to these creatures. The entity in the *Personification of Grief* is my own iteration on the actual entity I've encountered that has a similar face. When I first encountered them in waking, I could tell they were of a low vibration, meaning they were not a creature of light. But I didn't feel threatened, they carried no ill intent nor malice, so I didn't feel any need to disassociate myself from them. And that's why they've become a symbol for me; for pain, as they emanated this very negative, dark and heavy feeling. But I could tell they don't mean any real harm.

Otherwise, I know that some of the entities I've encountered have a much higher purpose. I haven't depicted any here today, but I can show you some examples.

Seja

Thank you for your time, brother.

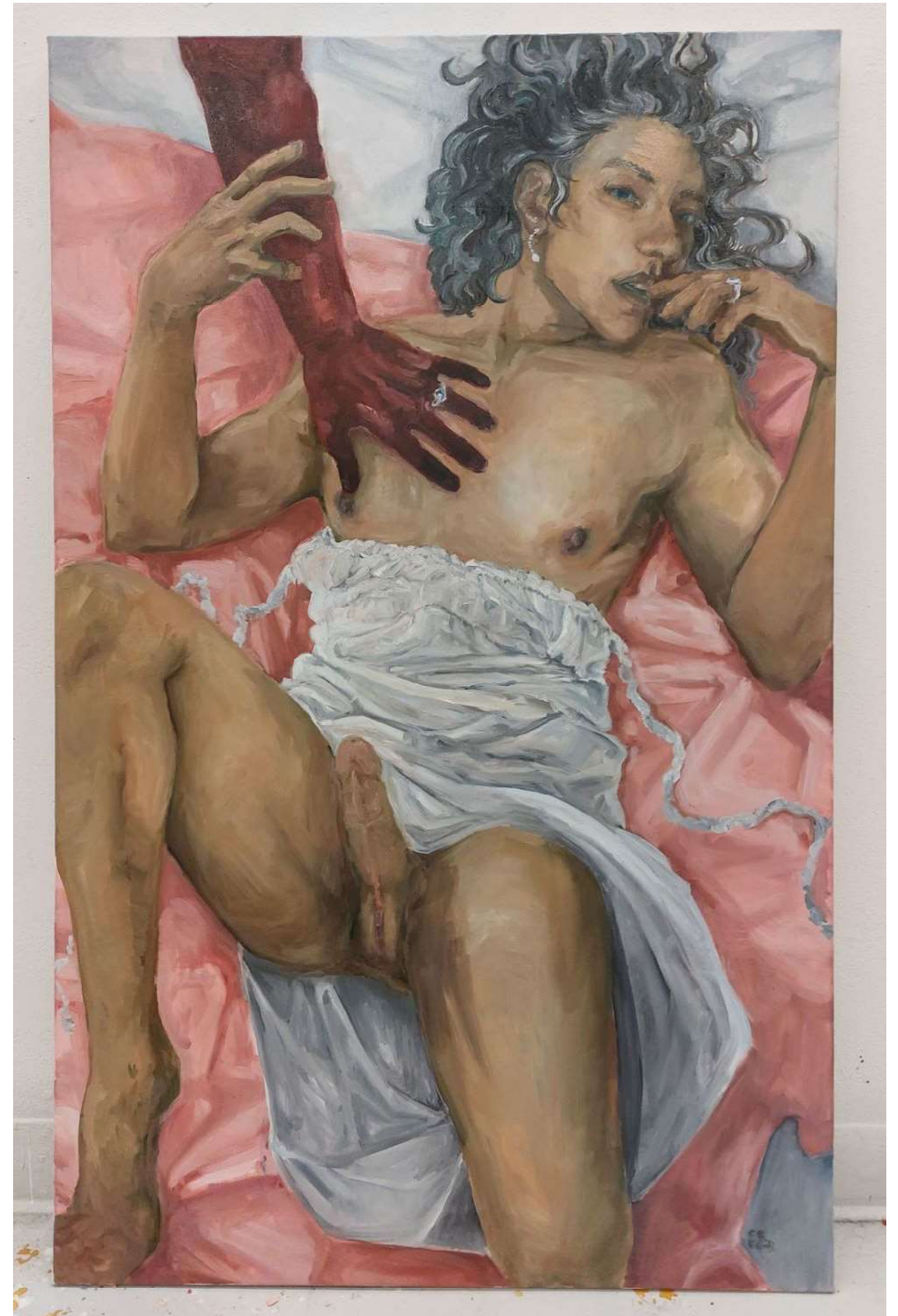


Figure 2: *Lilo*



FLASH BACK TO HALLOWEEN AND THE
LANDLORD GRAVEYARD

お祭り!





ZHÁ JIÀNG MIÀN!!

↳ 炸酱面

(BEIJING FRIED SAUCE NOODLES)

YOU WILL NEED:

- 1) HOT SOYBEAN PASTE
- 2) HOISIN SAUCE
- 3) SICHUAN CHILI BEAN PASTE
- 4) SUGAR
- 5) COOKING WINE
- 6) GARLIC
- 7) GINGER
- 8) GREEN ONION
- 9) CHINESE DRIED MUSHROOMS
- 10) GROUND PORK
- 11) THICK CHINESE NOODLES

② MAKE THE SAUCE!

- 2 BIG SPOONFULS OF:
 - A) HOT SOYBEAN PASTE
 - B) HOISIN SAUCE
 - C) SICHUAN CHILI BEAN PASTE
- 1 TABLESPOON OF SUGAR
- 1 CUP OF COOKING WINE

→ MIX IT UP! CREATE THE BASE OF THE SAUCE.

③ COOK THE MEAT!

- 2 TABLESPOONS OF
 - A) DICED GARLIC
 - B) DICED GINGER
 - C) GREEN ONION
- CHINESE DRIED MUSHROOMS
 - ↳ ADD AS MUCH AS YOU WANT ***
 - PREPARE BY SOAKING MUSHROOMS IN BOILING WATER FOR 15-20 MINS

→ ADD TO WOK WITH ABOUT 1 POUND OR SO OF GROUND PORK.
(SEASON WITH SALT + PEPPER)

*** COOK ON MED-HIGH ***

WHEN THE MEAT IS COOKED,
ADD THE SAUCE!

SERVE YOURSELF A BOWL OF NOODLES AND SCOOP SOME SAUCE ONTO IT...

ENJOY!

① COOK THE NOODLES!

- BOIL WATER IN POT (LOTS OF WATER!)
- COOK NOODLES UNTIL SOFT AND CHEWY
- DRAIN WATER + DOUSE IN COLD WATER TO SHOCK NOODLES
- DRAIN. ADD A LITTLE OIL TO NOODLES TO PREVENT STICKING.

①

